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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
Priority Theme: Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

Statement submitted by the Doha International Family Institute, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

“Surviving a Crisis – Building on Family Strengths towards an Inclusive and Resilient Recovery from COVID-19”

Introduction

The family in all parts of the world is currently undergoing radical changes exacerbated with the global pandemic. The prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced societies and governments to develop and implement policies with measures of social distancing that in turn affected the roles and responsibilities of families, who had to learn how to adapt. In a study conducted by the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) in 2020 on “Surviving a Crisis: A Case Study on the Impact of Coronavirus on Family Cohesion in Qatar”, the family in Qatar faced multiple economic, social, health, psychological and educational challenges. From an educational perspective, 88 percent of couples stated that they worked from home during the pandemic, of which 34 percent stated that the pandemic impacted their children’s education negatively, however, 48 percent stated that it left a positive impact on their relationship with their children. From a social perspective, social isolation represented a major challenge, considering the uniqueness of the situation, and it affected family members, creating tension and conflict between them. Another challenge was that of taking care of the elderly, which in many cases remains a familial responsibility, that almost always falls on the women within the family.

However, there is a bright side to the story. The lockdown provided opportunity for families to be more connected and enhanced family cohesions and overall mental wellbeing. Families have shown that together they are resilient and cohesive. In fact, 64 percent of families in Qatar confirmed that the impact of the pandemic was positive, focusing specifically on the cohesiveness of their members, as they became closer and more connected. Almost 40 percent of families stated that life was better with the increased time spent with their family members, highlighting the importance of adhering to work-family balance policies and arrangements. Moreover, almost 30 percent of couples noticed more cooperation amongst each other, noting a potential change in gendered roles and responsibilities within families. Finally, family violence decreased during the pandemic, such that adolescents that participated in a study on “Adolescent Wellbeing in Qatar” in 2020, stated that the percentage of family members who argued with each other in a scary way decreased from 25 to 15 percent before and during the pandemic respectively.

In crisis, families connect more than fragment. Research indicates that families living in the most difficult circumstances draw upon a rich set of characteristics or “family strengths”, that enable them to nurture their members and continue to prosper in the fact of even the most extreme adversity. For example, in a research conducted by DIFI on migration stressors and marital relations among Arab refugee families in Canada in 2018, families showed resilience and fluidity in dealing with the challenges they faced. The roles of parent, provider, and protector were in flux post-migration – new gendered roles were taken on in many cases, especially as some women were able to locate employment in a transit country and/or to learn new languages quicker than men, and thus, took on breadwinner roles while their husbands stayed home to care for the children. As such, families found a way to address their challenges head on and pave their way forward. With that said, the institution of the family remains the backbone of societies and serves as the primary source of support and aid for its members. Family strengths not only contribute to family cohesion and foster the individual growth and well-being of all its members, but also have positive benefits for communities and societies as a whole. Building on family strengths and developing and enacting policies and programs that support families in their roles and

responsibilities will allow for an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

To this end, we recommend:

- The provision of psychological and social support to help families and enhance their ability to adapt to the pandemic.
 - The provision of family friendly policies, such as flexible working arrangements to support families in their roles and responsibilities, have to be extended after the pandemic.
 - The creation of governmental and non-governmental support networks to financially support vulnerable families affected by the pandemic.
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